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ABSTRACT

This booklet for Wisconsin parents of children with disabilities discusses the processes and functions of special education. It describes steps in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team process, including: referring a child for special education; evaluating the child; deciding what services are needed and writing the IEP; deciding where the child will receive services and sending the placement notice to parents; reviewing the IEP and placement at least once each year; and reevaluating the child at least once every three years. Participants on the IEP team are identified, and ideas are provided for preparing for the IEP team meeting. The booklet explains the different components of the IEP and also provides strategies for solving problems that parents may have. The booklet closes with a worksheet for parents. (CR)

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An Introduction to

Special Education

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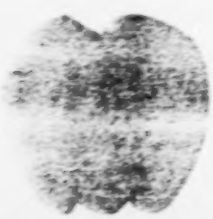

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An Introduction to Special Education

Welcome to special education. You will hear many new words. Ask if you don't know what they mean. Here are some you will hear.

DPI: Department of Public Instruction. DPI is in charge of all public schools.

evaluation: A team decides if your child needs special education. You are part of the team. The team will decide the kind and amount of services.

IEP: Individualized Education Program. The IEP is a written plan. It tells what a child will learn in a year. It tells the services the school will give.

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. It is the federal special education law.

LEA: Local educational agency. Your LEA is usually your school district.

(See page 9 for more special education words.)

A division in the DPI takes care of special education. This division is called the Division for Learning Support: Equity and Advocacy or DLSEA.

You can call DPI - main phone number if you need to contact DPI - 800-441-4563

TDD - 608-267-2427

DPI has a website at http://www.dpi.state.wi.us. The DPI website has much useful information.

There are other agencies to help parents:

FACETS
2714 North Dr. Martin Luther King Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53212
(414) 374-4645
TDD: (414) 374-4635

Native American Family Empowerment Center
2932 Highway 47N
P.O. Box 9
Lac du Flambeau, WI 54538
(800) 472-7207

Parent Education Project of Wisconsin (PEP-WI)
2192 South 60th Street
West Allis, WI 53219-1568
(414) 328-5520
TDD: (414) 328-5525
(800) 231-8382

Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy
16 North Carroll Street
Suite 400
Madison, WI 53703-2716
(608) 267-0241

Wisconsin Family Ties
16 North Carroll Street
Suite 640
Madison, WI 53703
(608) 267-6888
(800) 422-7145

Wisconsin Statewide Parent-Educator Initiative
Building D-2, Mailbox 65
800 Wisconsin Street
Eau Claire, WI 54703
(877) 732-9472

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If your child has a disability, special education can help your child learn.

You will work as part of a team along with others from the school. The team will decide if your child qualifies for special education. If your child qualifies, the team will make a written plan for your child. The plan is called an *Individualized Education Program* or IEP. The team is called the IEP team.

The IEP is developed by the IEP team at a meeting. An IEP is good for one year. But it can be changed if it is not working.

The IEP team has a very important job. You will want to go to all IEP team meetings. You will want to be part of all the decisions about your child.

You know your child best. The IEP team needs you!

Who participates on the IEP Team?

- Parents. Parents are equal partners with the school staff on the IEP team.
- The child, when the team plans for life after high school and at other times, if appropriate.
- An LEA (school district) representative. A person from the school district who can make sure your child gets the IEP services.
- The child's regular education teacher.
- The child's special education teacher.
- Someone who can explain the tests your child took.
- For an older child, someone from each agency that will provide services to prepare the child for life after high school.
- Other people invited by you or by the school.

Sometimes one person does more than one job on the team.

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Referral

Anyone can ask the school to decide if a child needs special education. You, a teacher, a nurse or a doctor can ask. This is called a referral. A referral must be written. You can send a referral letter to the principal or special education director.

A referral letter should:

- Tell the date.
- Say "This is a referral for special education."
- Tell the child's first and last name, date of birth, and school.
- Tell why you think the child might need special education.

Your school has 90 calendar days from the date they get a referral to:

- evaluate your child
- write an IEP
- decide where your child will go to school and tell you in writing.

The school will send you paperwork. Start a file.

You need to understand the papers so you can help the others on the IEP team. If you don't understand something, call the school. They will explain it. They also will tell you where you can get more help understanding it.

Steps in the IEP Team Process:

1. Referring your child for special education.
2. Evaluating your child.
   - Does your child have an impairment?
   - Does your child need special education?
3. Deciding what services are needed and writing the IEP. The school must have a meeting to write the IEP within 30 days of deciding your child is eligible for special education.
4. Deciding where your child will receive services and sending the parents a placement notice.
5. Reviewing the IEP and placement at least once each year.
6. Reevaluating your child at least once every three years.

State and federal laws say parents must get notices at several important steps in the process

You will get a written notice:

- before the IEP team evaluates your child (even if no new testing is needed).
- before the school puts your child in special education.
- before the school changes your child's IEP or placement.
- if the school refuses your request to change your child's evaluation. IEP, services, or placement.

As a parent you will also get a list of special education rights:

- when the school gets a special education referral for your child.
- with the invitation to your child's IEP meeting.
- when your child is reevaluated by an IEP team.
- if you request a due process hearing.

Your permission is important. The school must get your permission at key times. You must give your written permission:

- before the IEP team gives your child special tests.
- before the school first gives your child special education.

Make sure you know what you are signing. If you don't understand all the paperwork, ask the school to explain. It's important that you understand. That way you can help the IEP team make good decisions.

Evaluations:

An IEP team evaluates your child. The IEP team starts by looking at information it already has. You will share information about your child. You and the rest of the team will decide if the team needs more information. This can happen at a meeting or through a telephone call. Sometimes more information is needed. Then the team decides how to get more information. The teachers might test your child. They might watch your child in class. They will get a complete picture of your child.

Before the teachers test your child, you will be told in writing about the tests. The school will ask your permission to give the tests. When the testing is finished, you will be invited to an IEP team meeting.

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The IEP Team Meeting

You are an equal partner on the IEP team along with the teachers. You are an expert about your child. Speak up! The rest of the team needs your ideas.

At the meeting any teacher who gave tests will give a written report. The team will talk about all the information. This includes what you have told the team. The team will decide if your child has one of the impairments in state rules. The team will decide if your child needs special education. Then the team will write an evaluation report. If your child is not eligible for special education, the school will tell you in writing.

If a person on the team asks, the school will give everyone a copy of the evaluation report. The school will give it before writing the IEP and deciding where your child will go to school only if someone asks for the report. Otherwise, you will get the report when the school tells you where your child will go to school.

If your child will get special education, the team writes an IEP. When the IEP is finished, the team decides where your child will go to school. The team decides based on the IEP.

Sometimes the IEP team can do all of its work in one meeting. Sometimes it takes more than one meeting. You may want to take a break before planning your child's program. You may need time to read the reports. You may need time to talk to others about what the team decided. Ask the IEP team to wait if you need some time. The school will hold another meeting to finish.

Ideas for IEP team meeting:

Talk with your child's teachers before the meeting.

Bring a list of your questions or concerns. You can use the worksheets in this booklet.

Some parents find it stressful to go to an IEP team meeting. Bringing someone with you may help.

You can bring an expert or someone who knows your child to the IEP meeting.

If you need notes to remember what was said at the meeting, take notes or ask someone to do it for you.

If you need time to think or talk to someone else, tell the rest of the IEP team that you want to set up another meeting.

The following impairments are listed in state rules:

- Autism
- Cognitive Disability - CD
- Emotional Disturbance - ED
- Hearing Impairment - HI
- Learning Disabilities - LD
- Orthopedic Impairment - OI
- Other Health Impairment - OHI
- Significant Developmental Delay - SDD
- Speech or Language Impairments - SLI
- Traumatic Brain Injury - TBI
- Visual Impairment - VI

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What is in the IEP?

The IEP includes—

- your child's present level of school performance.
- annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks.
- special education and related services.
- the starting date, amount, frequency, location, and duration of IEP services.
- sevices your child needs to succeed in regular education.
- supports that teachers need to teach your child.
- the extent your child will be in regular classes and learn the general education curriculum.
- for children 14 and older, planning for life after high school
- how the school will measure progress on the IEP goals.
- how the school will tell you about your child's progress on IEP goals.

Writing the IEP

The IEP is a plan. It tells about your child's school needs. It tells what your child's learning goals are for the year. It tells what services the school will give your child.

As much as possible, your child will be in the regular classroom. As much as possible, your child will learn what children without disabilities learn.

At least once a year the IEP team must meet to talk about the IEP. You can ask the IEP team to meet and make changes if you think they are needed. Call your principal or your child's teacher or write a letter.

Where Will Your Child Go to School?

When the team finishes the IEP, the team will decide where your child will go to school. The team will decide based on the IEP.

As much as possible, a child with a disability should go to the same school with children without disabilities. Sometimes this is not possible. Sometimes the child's IEP can't be carried out in the same school. Then the child should go to a school as close as possible to home.

At least once a year the IEP team meets to decide where your child should go to school.

After the IEP Team Meeting

The school may ask you to sign the IEP. Signing it does not mean you agree with everything. Signing it means you were at the meeting. So even if you don't agree with everything, you can sign it.

You can ask for a copy of the IEP. If you do not ask for it, you will get a copy when the school tells you in writing where your child will go to school.

You should be able to understand the IEP. You can give a copy to anyone.

All of your child's teachers can read the IEP. The teachers must follow the IEP. The school must tell each teacher how to follow the IEP.

If this is the first time your child will get special education, the school will ask for your written permission. After you give it, the school will start your child's special education.

Several times during the year, the school will tell you if your child is making enough progress to reach the IEP goals. The team should review the IEP if your child is not making enough progress. If you think the IEP needs to be changed, ask for the IEP team to meet again.

What about your child's ideas?

You can ask your child what he or she needs.

You can tell the IEP team what you think your child needs.

Many children can be a part of their own IEP team! You can bring your child to the IEP meeting.

If possible you should talk to the school before bringing your child to the IEP team meeting.

Older children (by age 14) must be invited to IEP team meetings that plan for life after high school.

If your child can understand the IEP, you can share it with him or her.

You are not alone. There are more than 121,000 children in Wisconsin who receive special education services.

You can call any of the groups listed on page 1 to talk about special education problems.

There are also many local parent support groups. You can meet other parents and learn what you need to know about special education. Your school or the agencies listed on page 1 can tell you about groups near you.

Sometimes problems can't be solved without an outside person's help. To find out more or to ask for mediation call—

The Wisconsin Special Education Mediation System at

(888) 298-3857
(414) 288-1425
FAX: (414) 288-7537

Solving Problems

If you have a problem, try talking to people at school. Sometimes you may not agree with the decisions of the IEP team. Try these!

- Ask someone for advice.
- Write a letter to the school.
- Ask for another IEP team meeting.
- Talk it out.
- Say, "Can you help me understand...?"
- Make suggestions: "Would you be willing to try....?"

You can also ask for mediation. There are trained people (mediators) to help. A mediator can help you and the school solve the problem. Both you and the school must agree to do it. It is free. The meetings are private. Any agreement will be in writing. The law says that you and the school must follow the agreement.

IEP team meetings or mediation can solve most problems. If you need help, you can talk to a parent group or a program to help parents. In a rare case, these might not work. You can ask for a due process hearing. This is a formal hearing before a judge. The judge will decide the question.

If you think the school broke special education laws, you can file a complaint with DPI. You can call DPI for more information about hearings and complaints.

Do you want to learn more about special education?

Do you want to know more about IEPs?

You can get a book called
Special Education in Plain Language.

It is available from:

- Parent Education Project of Wisconsin, Inc.
  2192 South 60th Street
  West Allis, WI 53219
  (414) 328-5520 or (800) 231-8382.
- Your school district's special education office.

(Please note: availability may be limited.)

Special Education in Plain Language is also at the DPI website, http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlsea/een/parent.html

More special education words you will use:

mediation: An outside person helps parents and the school solve problems.

placement: The placement is the IEP, the type of special program (e.g., resource room, self-contained class), and the child's school.

reevaluation: At least once every three years, the IEP team evaluates to see if your child still needs special education.

referral: When someone thinks a child might need special education and tells the school in writing.

related services: Services your child needs to benefit from special education.

special education: The special teaching your child gets to meet his or her needs as a child with a disability.

Other good websites for parents:

http://members.aol.com/pepofwi

http:// www.familyvillage.wisc.edu

Topics in *Special Education in Plain Language* include:

- Parents' Rights
- Getting School Records
- Private Schools
- Problem Solving
- Discipline and Behavior Issues
- The IEP Process
- Time Lines
- Parent Consent
- What Schools Do
- What Parents Need to Know
- Tips and Ideas
- List of Resources and Organizations
- and MORE!

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A Worksheet for Parents

Child's Name:_____ Date of Birth:_____

School Year:_____ School:_____

District:_____

My child's special education teachers and their phone numbers:

_____

_____

_____

_____

My child's general education teachers and their phone numbers:

_____

_____

_____

_____

My child's principal and phone number:

_____

Other important school numbers:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Members of my child's IEP team and their phone numbers:

Dates for this year's IEP team meeting:

Things my child is good at:

Things I want the school to help my child learn this year:

A Worksheet for Parents *(continued from other side)*

My concerns or problems:

I hope my child's teachers know that...

Some people I could invite to come with me to IEP meetings: